

CLAIMS:

We claim:

1. An article of footwear comprising:
  - a cleat assembly;
  - a cushioning midsole bonded to the cleat assembly;
  - an upper lacking a full-length lasting board and bonded directly to the cushioning midsole.
2. The article of footwear of claim 1, wherein the cushioning midsole comprises a closed-cell compressed foam element.
3. The article of footwear of claim 2, further comprising an air cushion, wherein:
  - the cushioning midsole comprises toe and heel regions,
  - the air cushion is generally located in the heel region between the upper and the midsole,
  - the foam element is approximately 2-3 mm thick in the toe region, and
  - the combined thickness of the foam element and air cushion is approximately 8-10 mm.
4. The article of footwear of claim 2, wherein the cushioning midsole comprises heated and compressed ethylene vinyl acetate foam.

5. The article of footwear of claim 1, wherein the midsole covers substantially the entire sole of a wearer's foot and extends upward along sides of the wearer's foot in a substantial portion of the periphery of the midsole.
6. The article of footwear of claim 1, wherein the upper comprises a peripherally-stitched Strobel sock.
7. The article of footwear of claim 1, wherein the upper further includes:
  - a padded collar element,
  - a lining covering the collar and extending inside a portion of a foot-receiving region of the article, the portion of the foot-receiving region being substantially free of discontinuities around the heel of a wearer.
8. The article of footwear of claim 7, wherein the padded collar element is padded with a closed cell foam.
9. An article of footwear, comprising:
  - an upper; and
  - a cleat assembly coupled to the upper, the cleat assembly including:
    - a base having medial and lateral sides,
    - a plurality of downwardly extending ground engaging members,
    - a medial support bar located on the medial side,
    - a lateral support bar located on the lateral side,

a lateral stiffened section located in a region of the cleat assembly generally corresponding to a midfoot portion of the lateral support bar, and

a medial stiffened section located in a region of the cleat assembly generally corresponding to a midfoot portion of the medial support bar, the medial stiffened section being stiffer than the lateral stiffened section.

10. The article of footwear of claim 9, wherein the medial and lateral support bars are formed separately from the base and attached to the base.

11. The article of footwear of claim 9, further comprising a connecting matrix, wherein:  
the connecting matrix overlays at least a portion of the base, and  
the lateral and medial support bars are disposed between the connecting matrix and the base.

12. The article of footwear of claim 11, wherein the portion of the connecting matrix in the medial stiffened section is thicker than the portion of the connecting matrix in the lateral stiffened section.

13. The article of footwear of claim 9, wherein the midfoot section of the medial support bar is thicker than the midfoot section of the lateral support bar.

14. The article of footwear of claim 9, wherein the medial and lateral support bars are outwardly visible.

15. The article of footwear of claim 14, further comprising a clear or translucent connecting matrix overlaying the medial and lateral support bars.

16. The article of footwear of claim 14, further comprising a connecting matrix overlaying the medial and lateral support bars so as to reveal the shapes of the medial and lateral support bars.

17. The article of footwear of claim 9, wherein:

the medial support bar extends approximately from a region corresponding to the rear of the calcaneus of a properly fitted wearer of the article to approximately the head of the first metatarsal of the wearer, and

the lateral support bar extends approximately from a region corresponding to the rear of the calcaneus of the wearer to approximately the head of the fifth metatarsal of the wearer.

18. The article of footwear of claim 17, wherein at least the midfoot sections of the medial and lateral support bars are stiffer than the base.

19. The article of footwear of claim 17, wherein the medial support bar midfoot section comprises a supplemental stiffening element.

20. The article of footwear of claim 19, wherein the supplemental stiffening element comprises a nickel-titanium alloy strip.

21. The article of footwear of claim 17, wherein the cleat assembly is open in at least a portion of the midfoot region.

22. The article of footwear of claim 17, wherein the base includes a cross-sole flexure region extending from the lateral side to the medial side in a forward forefoot region.

23. The article of footwear of claim 22, wherein the lateral support bar terminates on a heel side of the flexure region and the medial support bar comprises a flexible extension within the flexure region and a phalangeal support coupled to the flexible extension.

24. The article of footwear of claim 17, wherein a majority of the ground engaging members are integral to the base and protrude through the support bars.

25. The article of footwear of claim 17, wherein the lateral support bar and the medial support bar are stiffer than any portion of the base coupling the lateral and medial support bars.

26. The article of footwear of claim 17, wherein the lateral and medial support bars are free of integral connecting members.

27. The article of footwear of claim 17, wherein the lateral and medial support bars comprise thermoplastic polyurethane.

28. The article of footwear of claim 17, wherein the lateral and medial support bars comprise a glass fiber reinforced plastic.

29. The article of footwear of claim 17, further comprising a cushioning midsole bonded to the base, and wherein the upper lacks a full-length lasting board and is directly bonded to the cushioning midsole.

30. The article of footwear of claim 29, wherein the cushioning midsole comprises a closed-cell compressed foam element.

31. The article of footwear of claim 30, further comprising an air cushion, wherein:  
the cushioning midsole comprises toe and heel regions,  
the air cushion is generally located in the heel region between the midsole and the upper,  
the foam element is approximately 2-3 mm thick in the toe region, and  
the combined thickness of the foam element and air cushion is approximately 8-10 mm.

32. The article of footwear of claim 30, wherein the cushioning midsole comprises heated and compressed ethylene vinyl acetate foam.

33. The article of footwear of claim 30, wherein the upper comprises a peripherally-stitched Strobel sock.

34. The article of footwear of claim 30, wherein the upper further includes:

a padded collar element,

a lining covering the collar and extending inside a portion of a foot-receiving region of the article, the portion of the foot-receiving region being substantially free of discontinuities around the heel of a wearer.

35. The article of footwear of claim 30, wherein the midfoot section of the medial support bar is thicker than the midfoot section of the lateral support bar.

36. The article of footwear of claim 30, wherein the medial support bar midfoot section comprises a supplemental stiffening element.

37. The article of footwear of claim 30, wherein the lateral support bar terminates on the heel side of a cross-sole flexure region, the cross-sole flexure region extending from the lateral side to the medial side in a forward forefoot region, and the medial support bar comprises a flexible extension within the cross-sole flexure region and a phalangeal support coupled to the flexible extension.

38. The article of footwear of claim 37, wherein a majority of the ground engaging members are integral to the base and protrude through the support bars.